

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 05419

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (FUKUDA, TAKEO)
SUBJECT: FUKUDA VISIT PAPER: JAPAN AND KOREA

REF: TOKYO 4578

1. KOREA CONTINUES TO HOLD A UNIQUE SIGNIFICANCE FOR BOTH JAPANESE POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY. KOREA-RELATED MATTERS RETAIN THE POTENTIAL FOR GREATER DOMESTIC CONTROVERSY THAN ANY OTHER FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE IN JAPAN TODAY. ALTHOUGH JAPAN AND THE ROK ARE BOUND TOGETHER BY A THICK WEB OF COMMON INTERESTS, THERE IS STILL NO BROAD DOMESTIC CONSENSUS AS TO JAPAN'S PROPER ROLE VIS-A-VIS THE TWO KOREAS. CONSEQUENTLY, EVEN THOUGH PM FUKUDA IS ONE OF THE ROK'S STRONGEST SUPPORTERS WITHIN JAPAN, DOMESTIC POLITICAL SENSITIVITIES FREQUENTLY INHIBIT HIS GOVERNMENT FROM FULL AND PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF THIS SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY AS IT RELATES TO SECURITY MATTERS.

2. JAPANESE ANXIETIES OVER THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. GROUND TROOPS FROM SOUTH KOREA, SO LOUDLY VOICED LAST YEAR, HAVE BY AND LARGE BEEN MUTED BY EVIDENCE THAT THE WITHDRAWAL WILL NOT BE CONDUCTED IN A DESTABILIZING MANNER. THE JAPANESE WILL, HOWEVER, CONTINUE TO WATCH THE
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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WITHDRAWAL CLOSELY. THEIR FEARS COULD EASILY BE REANIMATED, PARTICULARLY IF THE ADMINISTRATION APPEARS TO BE PRESSING FORWARD WITH THE SCHEDULED WITHDRAWAL EVEN IN THE ABSENCE OF CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF COMPENSATORY MEASURES FOR THE ROK MILITARY.

3. SIMILARLY, THE JAPANESE, SENSING THAT THE SITUATION

ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA IS MOVING INTO A NEW AND MORE FLUID STAGE, WILL CONTINUE TO LOOK TO THE U.S. TO TAKE THE LEAD IN SOME FORM OF DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE DESIGNED TO
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PROMOTE A LONG-TERM REDUCTION OF TENSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO KOREAS. IRONICALLY, THERE IS ALSO A PERSISTENT FEAR THAT THE US MIGHT MAKE A SUDDEN AND UNILATERAL APPROACH TO PYONGYANG WITHOUT INFORMING JAPAN. INDEED, THIS CONCERN IS ONE OF THE MOTIVE FORCES BEHIND JAPAN'S OWN EFFORTS TO DEVELOP A GRADUAL AND LOW-KEY DIALOGUE WITH THE NORTH KOREANS.

4. THE GOJ HAS BEEN TROUBLED BY THE RECENT STRAINS IN US-ROK RELATIONS OCCASIONED BY HUMAN RIGHTS CRITICISM AND THE PARK TONG SUN SCANDALS, FEARING THAT US SUPPORT FOR THE ROK WILL BE JEOPARDIZED BY THESE FRICTIONS. FURTHERMORE, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE CONCERN IN TOKYO THAT, IN A REPLAY OF THE LOCKHEED AFFAIR, CONGRESSIONAL "KOREAGATE" INVESTIGATIONS WILL SOMEHOW PRODUCE JAPAN-RELATED EVIDENCE WHICH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES COULD USE TO ATTACK THE LDP GOVERNMENT.

5. OVER THE PAST YEAR, JAPAN-ROK BILATERAL RELATIONS HAVE BEEN UNUSUALLY CALM AND PRODUCTIVE -- IN PART THE RESULT OF THE FUKUDA GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO
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CAPITALIZE ON AN INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS OF SOUTH KOREA'S IMPORTANCE TO JAPAN. ELEMENTS OF THE MODERATE OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE ALSO COOPERATED. FOR THEIR PART, THE SOUTH KOREANS HAVE SOUGHT TO MINIMIZE FRICTIONS, PARTICULARLY SINCE THEY LOOK TO JAPAN FOR VALUABLE ECONOMIC SUPPORT IN THE COMING YEARS AS THEY DEVOTE A GREATER PERCENTAGE OF THEIR OWN RESOURCES TOWARD THE QUALITATIVE IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR MILITARY. HOWEVER, POSSIBLE FAILURE OF THE DIET TO PASS IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION RELATING TO THE JAPAN-KOREA CONTINENTAL SHELF TREATY COULD PROVOKE A SHARP DETERIORATION IN RELATIONS. MOREOVER, GIVEN THE DISTASTE FELT BY LARGE SECTORS OF THE JAPANESE PUBLIC FOR THE EXCESSES OF THE PARK REGIME, EPITOMIZED BY THE 1973 KIM DAE JUNG ABDUCTION FROM TOKYO, AND THE READINESS OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES TO USE ANY KOREAN ISSUE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, THIS RELATIVE CALM COULD BE SHATTERED AT ANY TIME.

6. THERE WILL BE LESS SENSE OF URGENCY IN PM FUKUDA'S DISCUSSIONS OF KOREA IN WASHINGTON THIS TIME THAN DURING HIS MARCH 1977 VISIT, BUT HIS PRIMARY INTERESTS WILL BE MUCH THE SAME -- TO ENSURE THAT US SUPPORT FOR THE ROK

REMAINS FIRM AND THAT THE US WILL TAKE NO SUDDEN ACTION
WHICH MIGHT HAVE A MAJOR DESTABILIZING EFFECT ON NORTHEAST
ASIA. MANSFIELD

DISSIMINATION COORDINATED WITH SS/O PER MS. KENNEDY.

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